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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000366

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: OIL ACADEMY SHOOTING UPDATE

REF: BAKU 352

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Lu, for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On May 1, the day after the shooting at the Azerbaijan State Oil Academy which has left 13 people dead, several large protests were held. The demonstrators seemed to be expressing both sadness over the incident and some anger at the GOAJ over its decision not to announce an official day of mourning for the victims. There is still little information available on the shooter or his motives. In this information vacuum there are many rumors circulating on possible causes. Official reaction to the incident has been minimal, and largely based on assuring the people that this incident was not politically motivated. END SUMMARY.

#### LARGE PROTESTS HELD

¶2. (C) On May 1, Azerbaijani students gathered in large numbers in the streets surrounding the State Oil Academy to memorialize those killed in the shooting spree the day before. Embassy officials watched between 12:00-13:00 local time as a flower-laying ceremony turned somewhat angry, with students shouting "No to Terror" and demanding the government declare an official day of mourning. The demonstration began with about 500-600 students, and press reports say that it later grew to about 2,000 people. The students tried to march to Azadliq (Freedom) Square, but the police blocked them and sent them to 28 May Square instead, which is adjacent to the Oil Academy. Police also reportedly took away the demonstrators' large signs. This was the largest and most spontaneous street event held in Azerbaijan in several years, only rivaled by pro-government displays organized by the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party.

¶3. (C) Later on May 1 at 20:00 another flower-laying, candle-lighting "protest" was organized by several youth groups. An Embassy official present estimates nearly 1,000 people gathered on Azadliq (Freedom) Street in front of the main Oil Academy building and, when urged by police, moved back off Azadliq onto 28 May Square. There seemed to be participation of both pro- and anti-government groups. The protest remained peaceful, although the participants chanted loudly, sang the national anthem, and exchanged their concerns about both the tragic events of April 30 and the government's lack of response. By the next morning, the authorities had cleared away the candles, flowers and other tributes from in front of the Oil Academy.

#### LITTLE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON SHOOTER

¶4. (C) The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) and the Prosecutor General (PG) continue to investigate the shooting, although little information is available at this time. The official count of dead remains at 13, with 13 wounded. The dead included the accused shooter, Farda Gadirov, a 29-year-old citizen of Georgia of Azeri ethnicity. The PG has officially filed criminal charges against the deceased Gadirov. Press reports state that Gadirov's father, who lives in Russia, has come to Baku and identified the body of his son. MIA also reports that the shooting was done with a "Markarov" revolver, and that three cartridge belts and 71 bullets were found on Gadirov's body.

¶5. (C) Little information is available on the motive for the shooting, although rumors are running rampant through the country. Speculation runs from Russian and/or Armenian involvement to the shooter's possible links to extremist religious organizations. Many eyewitnesses claim there was more than one shooter, although officials are denying this. A man named Nadir Aliyev was reportedly arrested May 2 for links to the shooting. Aliyev reportedly came to Baku several years ago from Georgia, and ran a Turkish doner snack stand near the Oil Academy.

#### OFFICIAL REACTIONS

¶6. (C) President Aliyev made an official statement on the afternoon of April 30 expressing his condolences to the victims and their families. He asked for the families to

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have "patience and restraint" and promised the government would take all necessary steps. He did not declare any official day of mourning, however, and did not appear in person. The press are reporting that he did sign an executive order giving financial compensation to the families of the dead and wounded. Presidential Advisor on Social-Political Affairs Ali Hasanov also released a statement on April 30 stating that the shooting was not politically motivated, saying "such incidents take place in many countries."

¶7. (C) During World Press Freedom Day discussions May 1 and May 2, several editors and reporters expressed their disappointment in the government's failure to declare a day of mourning. They also complained that police had restricted the activities of journalists April 30 and failed to channel information effectively. They sheepishly admitted that foreign media outlets -- including Russian TV and CNN -- were on the air with news of the shootings before the Azerbaijani TV and radio reports appeared, calling April 30 a sad day for journalism as well as for the society as a whole.

#### COMMENT

¶8. (C) The Embassy has no information at this point to indicate that this shooting was anything other than the work of a one, isolated shooter. The GOAJ's downplaying of the incident and the lack of reporting on the incident in official media has clearly angered people, however. Many Azerbaijanis seem to be upset and angered over how such a tragedy could happen in their country, where gun violence is rare. The quick organization of large demonstrations is unusual in Azerbaijan, and may indicate a growing frustration with the current government, as well as the growing prevalence of SMS and Facebook style "flash mob" communication tools. A large celebration is planned for May 10 in honor of former President Heydar Aliyev's birthday, including a black tie gala. This could be another opportunity for Azeris to express dissatisfaction with the lack of a significant official reaction to this tragedy.

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